

# THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

*Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect.*

*We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.*

Testimony before the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
HB 367: State Department of Education – Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach

March 3, 2020

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC **supports** passage of SB 367- State Department of Education- Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach.<sup>i</sup>

SB 367 would expand the use of trauma-informed approaches in Maryland schools. It would require state guidelines, set up a pilot program and funding, and assess the effectiveness of this approach. Through training and changes in practice and policy, trauma-informed schools recognize trauma and integrate supportive policies and procedures into all aspects of education delivery. During 2018 and 2019, trauma-informed schools bills have been passed by state legislatures across the nation, including neighboring jurisdictions the District of Columbia and Pennsylvania.<sup>ii</sup>

Trauma-informed school systems take into consideration the tremendous advances in the science of the developing brain, the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACEs), and Resilience and require systems to rethink, develop and refine policies and practices to respond to trauma. CPMC supports SB 367 for the following reasons:

- Trauma-informed practices in schools take **Trauma Informed Schools help ALL children to feel safe and learn.**
- **School-based programs that address childhood trauma improve educational outcomes, including reducing suspension and expulsion rates and increasing graduation rates.**
- Childhood trauma is a growing public health crisis for the state with implications for our economic, educational, juvenile justice, criminal justice, and public health systems.
- It is estimated that nearly half of all children in the United States have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience, or ACE; and, Prior to age 16, two-thirds of children in the U.S. are exposed to a traumatic event, such as: natural and technological disasters; community violence, trafficking, or terrorism; sudden or violent loss of a loved one; substance use life-threatening illness; or, military family-related stressors.
- Child traumatic stress significantly impacts a child's success in school.

- A child with *four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)* is *46 times more likely* to have *learning or emotional problems*.
- Children who have *suffered three or more traumatic experiences* are *two-and-half times more likely to repeat a grade* than are children who have experienced none; *five times more likely* to have *severe attendance issues*; *six times more likely* to experience *behavioral problems*; and more than *twice as likely to be suspended* from school.
- Childhood traumatic stress impacts behavior—including aggression, disproportionate reactivity, impulsivity, distractibility, or withdrawal and avoidance—and disrupts the learning environment for all children; and, frequently leads to exclusionary school discipline measures and school absence.
- Educators working with traumatized students are particularly vulnerable to secondary traumatic stress, experiencing burnout, fatigue, irritability, and other symptoms. Staff, as well as, students and families are supported by schools that are trauma-informed.
- Supportive, stable relationships between children and their families, and other important adults in their lives, especially in schools, are known to buffer children from the effects of childhood traumatic stress.

For these reasons we urge a *favorable* committee report on **SB 367: State Department of Education – Guidelines on Trauma-Informed Approach**.

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<sup>i</sup> Members in support of position include: Advocates for Children and Youth, Associated Catholic Charities, Baltimore Child Abuse Center, Board of Child Care, Child Justice, Inc., Citizens Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates, The Family Tree, The Franklin Law Group, Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Maryland Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, Diana Philip, and the Maryland State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect.

<sup>ii</sup> District of Columbia, Iowa, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, Wisconsin